

Congresswoman Mazie K. Hirono's Military Service and Veterans Update



November 2009

Aloha!

As someone who supports our service members and veterans, I thought you might be interested in receiving regular updates on what Congress has been doing to support the men and women who have done so much for our country.

In the coming weeks and months, I'll be sending updates on House legislative action related to military issues and veterans' affairs.

If you or anyone you know might be interested in receiving these periodic updates please sign up below

[SIGN UP HERE](#)

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mazie K. Hirono".

Mazie K. Hirono
Member of Congress
Hawaii - 2nd District

News / Announcements

On October 22nd, President Obama signed the **Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act (H.R. 1016)**, into law. This new law authorizes Congress to approve VA medical care appropriations one year in advance so that the VA has more time to plan how to deliver the most effective and efficient care to an increasing number of veterans with increasingly complex medical conditions. Congresswoman Hirono was a cosponsor of this bill.

Reminder about New GI Bill Benefits

Last year, Congress enacted the new GI Bill for the 21st Century (the "Post-9/11 GI Bill") to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, making them part of the economic recovery. **These benefits started on August 1, 2009 and are available to an estimated 2.1 million veterans.** On May 1, 2009, veterans were able to start applying for a certificate of eligibility for the new college benefits at the VA website <https://www.gibill.va.gov/>. This year Congress also extended those college benefits to all children of soldiers who were killed in action (with no minimum military service needed to qualify). Generally, the measure provides up to four years of education benefits at a college or university for individuals with at least 90 days of active duty service on or after September 11, 2001, who have been honorably discharged from military service. The level of benefits are calculated on a sliding scale according to years served. To receive full benefits, applicants must have served on active duty for at least three years.

To determine your eligibility and benefits, please visit <https://www.gibill.va.gov/> or call 1-888-GI BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

Update on House Legislation

This week, the House overwhelmingly passed a series of measures that support and recognize our military personnel and veterans. The following are summaries of four bills that may be of interest to you and members of your organization.

Support for Military Personnel and Their Spouses

H.R. 3458, Unemployment Compensation Extension Act

This week, Congress passed comprehensive legislation to stimulate the economy and help American families and businesses get much-needed relief. In addition to providing 14 additional weeks of unemployment benefits to jobless workers, this bill provides [housing tax relief for military families](#). H.R. 3458 now goes to the President for his signature to become law.

H.R. 3458 ensures that certain payments under the Homeowners' Assistance Program (HAP) to assist military personnel selling a home that has declined in value are exempt from tax.

The bill also ensures that servicemembers will not have to repay the first-time homebuyer credit if they are ordered to deploy to a different location and, as a result, are forced to sell their home within three years.

Finally, this bill extends to April 31, 2011, the deadline for taking advantage of the first-time homebuyer credit for qualifying servicemembers, so that certain servicemembers stationed overseas for at least 90 days (between December 31, 2008, and May 1, 2010) can take advantage of the credit when they return.



Commanding Officer Col. Robert Rice briefs Congresswoman Mazie Hirono at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe, Oahu.

S. 475, the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act

After the Senate passed S.475 on August 4th, the House passed the bill on November 2nd. Currently, servicemembers are allowed to maintain their residency for certain purposes (e.g., voting, income taxes, and personal property taxes) in a state from which they are absent in compliance with military orders. S. 475 extends these residency protections to their spouses. This bill now goes to the President for his signature to become law.

H.R. 3949, the Veterans' Small Business Assistance and Servicemembers Protection Act

H.R. 3949 would allow servicemembers to terminate certain contracts with service providers, such as cell phone contracts, phone exchange services, multichannel video programming services, Internet services, or residential utility services.

This bill also prohibits the charging of early termination fees for rental or auto leases of servicemembers who later enter military service, receive a permanent change in duty station, or are deployed. H.R. 3949 would provide greater equity to servicemembers who need to relocate out of service to our country.

Assistance for Veterans

H.R. 1168, the Veterans Retraining Act

This bill authorizes the Labor Department to pay training assistance to veterans for up to six months. Eligible veterans would receive a monthly training assistance allowance of about \$1,400 for each month that a veteran is enrolled in an employment-training program that teaches a skill in demand.

To become eligible for benefits, veterans would have to be unemployed for at least four months and have successfully completed the program. They must also be ineligible for other education or training assistance programs administered by the VA in order to participate.

This bill will help unemployed veterans who normally don't qualify for job assistance and training programs by giving them the opportunity to learn new skills that can translate into well-paying jobs so that they are able to provide for themselves and their families.

H.R. 3949, the Veterans' Small Business Assistance and Servicemembers Protection Act

The legislation requires small businesses that are listed in a database administered by the VA to be verified as being owned by a veteran. The measure also requires the VA to establish and maintain procedures to ensure effective coordination of outreach activities between and among VA offices and departments.

In addition, H.R. 3949 establishes a scholarship program for students seeking a degree or certificate in blind rehabilitation if they agree to work in a VA hospital for three years.

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In addition, the House passed other legislation honoring our veterans, including resolutions honoring the service and achievements of **current and former female members of the armed forces** (H.Res. 868), paying tribute to the **U.S. Submarine Force** (H.Res.773), and recognizing the **Tower of Hope** (H.Res.291), a nonprofit that provides assistance dogs to wounded veterans at no cost.

